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3 Major Research Centers Reject Censorship

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WASHINGTON, April 9 — Three leading research universities have told the Reagan Administration they will refuse to conduct certain kinds of sensitive but unclassified scientific research for the Defense Department if military reviewers are given the power to restrict publication of the findings.

The presidents of Stanford, the California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have protested that a new Defense Department proposal aimed at preventing the disclosure of sensitive information to potential enemies would inter-

fere with open scientific communication on the nation's campuses.

The three presidents, Donald Kennedy of Stanford, Marvin L. Goldberger of Caltech, and Paul Grey of M.I.T., expressed their objections in a joint letter sent late last month to Richard D. DeLauer, Under Secretary of Defense for research and engineering, and George A. Keyworth 2d, the White House science adviser. The letter has not been made public but its general contents have been discussed at recent meetings in Washington and at the universities.

The three universities were reacting to a proposed Defense Department policy that would allow military reviewers to veto the publication of findings in some categories of research and comment in advance on the propriety of publishing findings in other categories.

These powers would be spelled out in provisions of the research contracts between the military agencies and the universities. They would apply to unclassified research that has not traditionally been subject to restrictions on publication or presentation to scientific meetings.

"We feel that restrictions as rigorous as this are potentially very threatening," Dr. Goldberger said in a telephone interview. "The essence of our letter was that the types of restrictions being considered could well make it impossible for us to accept certain contracts. It's a relatively small amount of money so it won't necessarily have a big direct impact on the universities. But it's the nose of the camel that we are worried about."

The most troublesome proposal, university officials say, would give military officials the final word on what findings may be published from applied research and development projects deemed "sensitive" by the Pentagon, even though they are not classified. Under the proposal, scientists would have to submit drafts of their papers to military reviewers 90 days in advance of publication, and the

Pentagon would then make the final decision on whether all or part of the material could be published.

University officials say they are concerned primarily about yielding the decision on publication to the Pentagon, and secondarily about the vagueness in determining what might be deemed "sensitive."

"We said, in effect, that restrictions of that sort would not enable our universities to accept such contracts," Dr. Goldberger said.

Gerald Lieberman, vice-provost of Stanford, told his faculty Senate last week there is "no way" that Stanford could acquiesce in prior Defense Department approval of publication.

"In accord with most major universities, we would be unable to accept research contracts with those provisions in them," he went on. "If we give in on this issue, we will have serious problems."

The volume of research that would be affected appears relatively small. Defense Department officials have reportedly told the universities that only 1 percent of all academic research paid for by the Defense Department would be considered "sensitive."

Pentagon officials reportedly have told university leaders that they might just have to accept the proposed restrictions or forgo the research money.

But John McTague, deputy director of the White House science office, welcomed the letter from the universities as a useful contribution in defining their position.